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5/25/2005
41674



172-108

In the Public Interest

Vilsack launches great places initiative

By Anita Walker
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Cultural Affairs

What do you think of when you imagine a great place?

Is it the heart of an historic downtown, where funky new shops fill old spaces and the charm of the past drives an authentic new lifestyle? Is it a bustling urban center or a quaint neighborhood? Is it a quiet spot along an Iowa lake or stream, surrounded by the natural beauty of a native prairie and the sounds of wildlife?

A great place ignores boundaries such as county lines and city limits. Its spirit defines its existence and connects its heart and soul – a lake, arts district, history, culture – with its trails and streets and housing and parks. And it connects with you.

In January, Gov. Tom Vilsack launched an unprecedented initiative: Iowa Great Places. He called on Iowans to be bold, innovative and entrepreneurial; to transform this state into a magnet for people. And he called on state government to become a true partner with the people of Iowa.

A team of 18 state agencies is launching a new kind of partner-

ship with Iowans. The goal is to collaborate with local leaders, combine resources for greater impact and deliver results.

Great ideas for great places will connect the present with the possibilities. But connecting government programs at the right place and the right time can be a daunting task for the heartiest Iowans. With Iowa Great Places, the state will help you access the services you need to fulfill your vision – a virtual one-stop shop that comes to you.

With this new approach, local leaders and groups in a place – a neighborhood, scenic vista or multi-county corridor – will invite the state to be a partner. In response to the invitation, we will send a team of coaches to you to listen and learn about your hopes, dreams and vision.

Once the coaches understand the needs to be addressed, a Great



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Place team representing various state agencies will work with you. Rather than asking you to navigate the maze of government, the Great Place team will deliver relevant programs and resources to you. We will work together to synchronize and streamline our programs to fit your vision, not to make your vision fit our programs.

Together we will negotiate a partnership that combines the capacity of government and local resources to turn your great idea into a Great Place. We will deliver programs and services to do the job from start to finish instead of one piece at a time.

The first phase of this initiative begins this month as we create a new kind of partnership with three pilot Great Places. This first year will be a learning experience, where we will test our concepts.

So, let your imagination run wild. Talk with your family and friends at home and work. What is special about your place? What would make it a great place?

For more information about the Great Places initiative, visit www.iowagreatplaces.gov.

– Anita Walker is director of the
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